A LECTURE

ON THE

Decline of

THE FISHERIES,

AND WHAT THE LECTURER CONSIDERS TO BE THE CHIEF CAUSES OF THAT DECLINE.

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LECTURE.

Mr. President, and Gentlemen of the Committee,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

By the kind permission of the Fishermen's Society I was allowed the use of their hall, last year, to deliver a lecture on the same subject as that to which I have to request your kind attention this evening. The lecture was, from several causes, but poorly attended, and its contents obtained but little publicity. I am happy to say, however, that they have not been altogether forgotten, and that the Fishermen's Society, encouraged, no doubt, by the lively interest which His Excellency the Governor has lately manifested towards this important subject, are endeavouring to gather all the information within their reach, with the view of doing something, if possible, to alleviate the distress which at present prevails among our fishing population, from the loss, to a great extent, of their principal means of support. In pursuance of that object the Society requested me to repeat the lecture. This request I considered as the highest compliment that could be paid to me, and which, I need scarcely say, I fully appreciate. In compliance with their request I have again been induced to appear before you, and, in doing so, I need hardly say that the opinions I then expressed, sustained by the circumstances mentioned in support of them, remain unaltered; and as I find that I am unable to do any thing by way of improvement, I shall give them to you just as I then gave them, with the addition of a little other matter which has since come under my notice. From the large extent to which all classes of our community are informed on the sub-

ject of our fisheries, I am aware that in venturing to treat of it I am exposing myself to the danger of much criticism. If, however, I have fallen into any error, I shall only be thankful for being corrected;—and without further preface I shall, with your kind permission, proceed with my subject,—"*The decline of the Cod-fishery, and what I consider to be the chief causes of that decline.*"

The gradual decline of the cod-fishery is a lamentable fact that we are all aware of. Almost every year there is a great falling off in the quantity of fish caught in the Island, especially in particular districts. Some years, however, there seems to be an improvement; but, on the whole, I think no one will dispute the fact that for a great many years past there has been a steady and gradual falling off in this most important branch of our fisheries. It requires no arguments that I could produce to prove that such is the deplorable fact. The most forcible and striking manner in which I could bring this before you is by drawing a sort of comparison, from what has come within my own experience, between the condition of some of the ports of this Island, some 30 or 40 years ago, and their present condition. A correspondent of the *Telegraph* wrote three letters, in the fall of 1860, on nearly the same subject as that I am now speaking of. The "Placentia Bayman" seemed very well acquainted with his subject, and gave a good deal of very useful information. The letters were written, as the writer says, "with the view of bringing the subject before the legislature, in order that something might be done in the matter." As, however, I believe he failed in his object, I shall take the liberty of again bringing before the public some of his observations, and add thereto such other information as I am possessed of. First, then, I shall endeavour to draw a comparison between the amount of trade carried on in some of the ports of Newfoundland, some thirty or forty years ago, and that now carried on. In Trinity there were, formerly, two large mercantile houses,—GARLAND'S,

and SLADE & KELSON's.] Each of these establishments owned a dock-yard, where they were in the habit of building a vessel every year, either for foreign trade or the Seal fishery;—the latter, both houses engaged in to a great extent. These establishments exported annually some 120,000 qtls. of cod-fish. One of them (SLADE's), which was then considered one of the richest in the Island, is now no more;—the other still continues a much-curtailed business, but under another firm, BROOKING & Co.; and the export of fish from Trinity is now only about 20,000 qtls. a-year,—a falling-off of five-sixths of the quantity formerly exported.

At Carbonear the trade and fisheries were carried on much more extensively than at the present time. There were two large mercantile establishments formerly flourishing in that place,—those of Goss, PACK & FRIAR, and SLADE, ELSON & Co.,—both of which have since declined. They have been succeeded, it is true, by others, but the business now carried on there is by no means so extensive.

[I now come to St. John's, where I admit that the trade has somewhat increased; but I intend, in a future part, to say a little about the fisheries, which have fallen off to a great extent in this as well as in other parts of the Island.] In Placentia and Fortune Bays the contrast between the trade and fisheries, (as carried on at the time I speak of) and their present condition is, perhaps, still more striking. In those days the trade and fisheries of these Bays were in a flourishing condition;—the merchants importing and supplying extensively, and the fishermen prosecuting the fisheries with energy and success.

Let us first look at Great Placentia. This was once the capital of Newfoundland, where the trade and fisheries were once conducted on a great scale. There was a dockyard in which vessels of large tonnage were built; and the people were comfortable and independent. At present it is reduced to a port of entry for Nova Scotia craft, and the business car-

ried on by these, together with a small coasting trade, is all that now remains of the extensive trade that once thrived in this place.

We come next to Little Placentia, where there was once a large mercantile establishment, which carried on the fishery to a great extent, both at Little Placentia and at Cape St. Mary's, where they sent a number of large boats. The quantity of fish annually exported by this house was 30,000 qtls. The private dwelling-house of the head of the establishment is all that now remains of it.

At Barren Island and Meresheen there were two mercantile establishments, which have since declined.

At Oderin business was carried on by the firm of SPURRIER & Co., which was one of the largest importing and exporting houses in the Island. This establishment has also shared the common fate, and a small trade with Halifax is all that Oderin can now boast of.

We now come to Burin,—that celebrated harbor for trade and shipping, where the last mentioned house of SPURRIER & Co., of Poole, carried on business at Ship's Cove most extensively,—perhaps not equalled by any other house in the Island. This establishment has also ceased to exist, and the buildings are in ruins. The house of FALL & Co. still remains, and is, I may say, the only importing and exporting mercantile establishment in Placentia and St. Mary's Bays.

At St. Lawrence, Messrs. NEWMAN & Co. carried on a large trade, which they have since abandoned.

In Fortune Bay the houses of NEWMAN & Co. and NICOLLE & Co. have greatly curtailed their business, which they formerly carried on to an almost unlimited extent. NEWMAN & Co. have closed their establishment at Little Bay, and their business is now chiefly confined to a barter trade.

These are some of the principal instances of the great falling off of the trade of the colony. I could mention several others, but I consider these sufficient to show how our merchants have either totally failed in

their pursuits, or that those, who have had more foresight and prudence, have either given up or greatly curtailed their business, in consequence of the gradual decline of the cod-fishery. But I am sorry to say that the merchants are not the only sufferers by this unfortunate state of affairs. The people of the country have come to such a state of destitution and want, that it requires nothing that I could say to impress you more forcibly with the fact than your experience has already done.

A member for Poole, in a speech made in the House of Commons said, that if something was not done for Newfoundland, it would go to the dogs. The house was in a roar of laughter. His speech was made, and no further notice was taken of it. Others who, probably, took the same basis for their calculations, have made similar prophecies; and I regret to say that in most instances, when the country was in a prosperous condition, and things looked pleasant, those prophecies have been treated with an equal amount of contempt,—and no more notice taken of them. But how have these predictions been fulfilled? Let us look at the former condition of the country,—a land that, figuratively speaking, "flowed with milk and honey," or, in other words, abounded with far more useful articles,—fish and oil.

Every man, woman and child then fared sumptuously, at least as compared with how they now fare. A want of the common necessaries of life was not then known by the poorest inhabitant from one extremity of the land to the other. When we contrast this picture of the condition of the people with that presented by their present condition, the result shows us how sadly those prophecies have been fulfilled. But I will not trespass on your time and attention by repeating this oft-told tale of want and misery at present pervading our unfortunate country. Let me now ask you to turn your attention to St. Peter's;—let us take a retrospective glance at the past condition of that little settlement, and contrast it with its present

condition. Up to the period to which I have referred, (30 years ago) the French obtained from their own baiting places, about Langley and Miquelon, a sufficient quantity of bait to enable them to carry on the Bank fisheries, independent of the English, with the exception of the sale to them of old boats which had been used by the English at Cape St. Mary's, and which were eagerly sought after by the French for the St. Peter's Bank Fishery. The number of vessels engaged on the Grand Bank was about 40 or 50, of 150 to 200 tons each. The St. Peter's Bankers numbered about 60 or 70, and were chiefly those old boats to which I just now alluded,—St. Peters being then little better than our outharbor fishing settlements now are. The shore fishery was carried on in flats or flat-bottomed boats;—and St. Peter's in itself was a poor, wretched, miserable looking place. Go to the same place now, in the Spring, and what do we see? The contrast is as striking as that between the past and present condition of Newfoundland, though unfortunately the other way. We now see the preparations for the Bank fisheries carried on on a magnificent scale,—a roadstead with some 150 Bankers anchored at a time;—the harbor so full of shipping, that it is with difficuity a vessel of any kind can get to a wharf, to discharge or take in. We see the improvements also in the works of building and architecture. The first object that meets the eye on entering the harbor of St. Peters is a formidable fort on Dog Island, erected during the time of the Crimean war;—another fort of six or eight guns at the entrance of the harbour, which has been there from an earlier date. There is a splendid chapel, a wooden building not equalled in Newfoundland, if in British North America. A Hospital, a pattern for our architects, should they even have occasion to build another in Newfoundland; and fine extensive Government stone buildings. The trade and business of this place have increased to a wonderful extent,—the mercantile establishments extending from one end of the

harbor to the other;—some of them carrying on business as extensively as any in Newfoundland. The town is full of shops, crammed with goods of every description, chiefly French and American,—the former being far superior to most of the British goods now imported into Newfoundland. The streets are full of British subjects, not only from this but also from the neighbouring colonies. With the latter there is an extensive trade carried on, by the importation from these colonies of lumber, scantling, spars, &c., for which they give in return their French and American goods. The people of Placentia and Fortune Bays also trade to a great extent with the French, receiving, in return for the bait supplied to them, their shop goods and provisions.

Thus, it will be perceived, that, according as Newfoundland has been going down hill, St. Peter's has been going up, and progressing in the same ratio that Newfoundland has been declining;—and according as Newfoundland has been becoming poorer, and our fisheries have been declining, so St. Peter's has been increasing in wealth, trade and population. This being the case, the question would naturally suggest itself to the most superficial observer,—what is the cause or causes producing these effects? Is there not some agency which, at the same time it has been bringing about the present unfortunate condition of Newfoundland, has been producing the opposite results? And is it not natural to suppose that the French are enriching themselves at our expense? There may be some who would attempt to dispose of the matter by ascribing it to an over-ruling Providence. But without at all questioning the agency of that Providence in bringing about these results, I would say, in my humble opinion, (and I hope to be able in a measure to sustain that opinion) there are other causes apparent to us, and over which we have somewhat control, that are naturally producing these effects.

The chief cause, in my opinion, of the falling off of

[illegible] the means by which the French have been enriching themselves), [illegible] by the French, of the bultow on the Banks. Most of you, no doubt, are acquainted with the make and manner of working the bultow; but for those who are not, it may not be out of place to give a sort of description of the way it is made and how it is used.

The Bultow, as used by the French, consists of a line, a little larger than what we call bank line, or a little smaller than ratline. To this line are attached smaller lines, or sed lines, which are about a yard in length, and separated a little more than a yard from each other. To these are attached hooks of a peculiar sort, which, being of a softer material than the common fish hook, are more suitable for their purpose. The bultow is put into a boat, of which every vessel has four or five, an anchor or grapnel, which is attached to the bultow, is thrown overboard, and at the same time a buoy, with a colour flying, attached to the bultow, is also thrown overboard to mark the place where one end of the bultow is moored. The boat is then rowed away, and the bultow, in the meantime, is being all paid out, when the other end is moored and marked with a buoy in the same manner as the first. When it is thought that the bultow is pretty well fished, or generally once a day, the fishermen then take the rope which attaches the buoy to the bultow.—(This rope, which is called the buoy-rope, is about the same length as the depth of the sea, so that the bultow lies on the bottom.) They take this rope and raise the bultow to the top of the water, without starting the mooring. When the fishermen come to the first hooks, the bultow is hooked on along the side of the boat, so that the hooks are just about the surface of the water. Each man has his own number of hooks to attend to. When they come to a hook with a fish on it the fish is lifted out of the water into the fishing room. Some times, when the fish is very large, a gaff is used. The weight of

the fish straightens out the hook, which, as I have said, is made of soft materials, and it slips out of the fish's mouth without difficulty. It is then put into its proper shape with a machine, always on hand for the purpose, and which requires only a movement of the hand to perform its work. The hook is then baited and thrown overboard, and they at once pass on to the next set of hooks, and so on till they have gone from one end of the bultow to the other. The bultow can thus be kept in the same place until it becomes necessary to remove it, to go to a better ground. These bultows, being each about a mile in length, contain, each, about 1,500 to 2,000 hooks. When numbers of these are set in all directions, with millions of baited hooks, it will readily be perceived that a greater quantity of fish can be caught by this means than by the ordinary method adopted by our own sturdy and industrious hook-and-line fishermen. But the immense quantity of fish caught by this system is not the only, or even the greatest, evil produced by it. It has been ascertained beyond doubt that the mother or breeding fish invariably take their food off the bottom. These fish are never, or very seldom, caught with the hook and line; and the bultow, from the bait lying on the bottom, as I have already shewn, is a certain means of catching these fish. Thus the fish caught with the bultows are always the largest. From this fact, and the great number of fish caught by this means, it will at once be seen the immense profit gained by fishing in this manner. The destruction of the breeding fish is, therefore, the most ruinous effect produced by this system. The bultows, moreover, extending for miles in all directions, with millions of baited hooks attached to them, have the evil effect, when put out early in the spring, of stopping the fish on the Banks, which otherwise would approach the shore at the usual seasons, and be caught by our own fishermen, or allowed to spawn.

The French are well aware of the fact of the fish being stopped in their progress by the bultow; and

hence it is that they always endeavour to procure their bait as early as possible, in order to get to the Banks in time to stop the fish from approaching our shores. I have no doubt that most of you are aware of the effects produced by this system. It would, I think, be unreasonable to suppose that any other results than those that I have mentioned could flow from a system such as this is. I will, however, mention the following circumstances in further support of this assertion. It is, I have no doubt, within the recollection of many of you (say forty years ago) that the fishery of St. John's was carried on differently from the way it is now conducted. The fishery then was commenced much earlier than at the present day, by going to the offing in three or four-handed jacks or boats. Those engaged in this offing fishery were in the habit of catching from 60 to 100 qtls. fish per boat, before the caplin scull. The fish thus taken were much larger than those now caught on the shore, and similar to those taken by the French on the Banks. The fishery was carried on in the same manner, and with like results, out of every harbour and cove between St. John's and Trepassey. The quantity thus taken before caplin scull being equal to the quantity taken of late years, in the same ports, for the whole season.

This offing fishery had been carried on as far back as the oldest fisherman then could recollect, and was equally productive every year until about the time of the introduction of the bultow on the Banks, about forty years ago; and since then there has been a gradual falling off every year, till now there is not a fish to be caught in the offing. It is not in the quantity only that the loss of the offing fishery is felt. The quality of the fish caught in the offing was superior to any now caught on the shore. Another advantage of the offing fishery was that we were enabled to send thousands of qtls. of fish to market at least a fortnight earlier than we now can; and consequently it fetched a much higher price, as the first fish is gene-

rally considered the best: and there was always a contention between our merchants to see who could get their fish off first. In addition to this, there were hundreds of firkins of sounds and tongues exported annually, which we have also lost by the failure of the offing fishery. The failure of the fishery in the offing, where fish were caught similar to those now caught on the Banks, and which, no doubt, used to strike in from the Banks, is a striking proof that the bultow, when used on the Banks, has the effect of stopping the fish from coming in to our shores.

Thus I have endeavoured to shew some of the most ruinous effects produced by this unfair method of catching fish. It stops the progress of the fish on the Banks, and by this means a much greater quantity of fish is caught than by our method;—and, worse than all, the breeding-fish are destroyed,—which otherwise would not be taken, and would multiply in numbers. This is a serious matter, and one which demands our gravest consideration. It is true that we cannot interfere with the French in their method of catching fish, as they have a right to fish as they please; but it would make no difference to us what means they use to catch fish, when there is no fish for them to catch. We may laugh at their bultows, or any other apparatus they may have for catching fish, when we know that the fish they expect to catch are already on our own shores. We have the means in our power (if permitted to use them) of producing this most beneficial effect. By refusing them the bait, or even detaining them a short time without it, which they have been in the habit of receiving from us and cannot do without, the fish, now detained on the Banks by the millions of baited hooks from the bultow, would come in to our shores, and we would again be enjoying the plenty we rejoiced in before this system was introduced. This will be more easily understood by observing the system adopted by the French in getting bait, and also using it to keep the fish on the ground.

The French bankers generally arrive on the Banks about the 1st of April. Some of them with a small supply of bait, such as makerel and sardines, remain on the Banks for the purpose of catching a little fish, but principally with the view of keeping the fish on the Banks while the others go on to St. Peter's. Here they receive a supply of herring from our fishermen, and at once proceed for the Banks, where they immediately set to work with their bultows. The others then leave for St. Peter's, and get their herring in the same manner. With this supply of herring they are enabled to catch a full trip of fish. The first vessels loaded, or out of bait, then come on to St. Peter's, where they discharge their fish and take in a sufficient quantity of caplin to catch another cargo. Thus there is almost a constant going in and out of bankers at St. Peter's, till the end of the caplin seull.

The stopping of the supply of the enormous quantity of bait which the French require for their system of fishing on the Banks is, in my opinion, the *only means* of checking the rapid decline of our cod fishery. It has been continually declining, and if the supply of bait to the French be continued it *will* decline, and just as fast as it has been declining, and the future of Newfoundland will be terrible to contemplate!

As an example of the inestimable benefit which would be derived from putting an end to the supply of bait to the French, or even in keeping it from them for a few weeks, I will mention the year 1846. The year previous a representation was made to the Government by the fishermen of the Western shore, upon which I, being at Lamaline, was called upon to make a report and suggest such means as I thought advisable. I accordingly suggested that a cruiser should be stationed at Lamaline to cruise between Fortune and Placentia Bays, in order to intercept the bait-carriers on their way, and make them clear out at the Custom-house. A vessel was, therefore, sent, which, though badly suited for the purpose, was nevertheless ably commanded by Mr. OKE, by whose

vigilance the French were prevented from getting bait, except as prescribed by law. The law was, that the bait-carriers were to clear from the Custom-house and pay an export duty of 3*s.* per cwt., or 6*s.* per barrel, on all bait exported. The imposition of this duty was at first, in effect, a prohibition from exporting the bait, from the fact that the bait-carriers were not certain of obtaining a price for the bait sufficient to cover the duty; and also that there was a great delay in going to the Custom-house stations for the purpose of getting a clearance. At the end of about three weeks, however, the French offered the enormous price of 40 francs per barrel for herring, which induced our fishermen to pay the export duty; and a sufficient quantity of bait was thus obtained. The consequence, however, was that the French bankers were detained three weeks later than usual. They had, as I have said, to pay 40 francs per barrel for what bait they did get. By the time they arrived on the Banks the fish had left the grounds and struck in towards the shore. The French never had a worse fishery than this year; while, on the other hand, the fish had come in to the shore in such quantities that our fishery that year was the best for the last forty years; and the quantity of fish exported that year (particularly large fish) was the largest ever known in Newfoundland. This, then, is a case in point, shewing, beyond all doubt, that by even detaining the French for a short time later than usual, the fish, which they are now catching by wholesale on the Banks with their bultows, would come into our shores, and our fisheries would be restored to what they formerly were. In my opinion it is the only means of saving the country, and until something be done to accomplish this end our fisheries will go on declining just as fast, or faster, than they have hitherto, until at last they will become a total failure. The French themselves are aware of the evil consequences accruing to them by such a proceeding; and hence it was that after the year I have mentioned they, becoming

alarmed lest they should lose the bait, offered our Government, through Mr. OKE, who was in command of the cruiser, the enormous sum of £5000 per annum, merely to be allowed to buy bait from our fishermen without obstruction,—thus shewing the value they set upon it. It is impossible to say to what amount this offer would have been increased, had it been insisted on; for I think the French would pay any amount rather than be deprived of this indispensable article.

The French themselves acknowledge the Banks to be an inexhaustible treasury, the key to which is our bait; and it is only in proportion to the bait we give them that they can procure the fish from the Banks.

It has been argued by some that they can get their bait, i.e. herring, at St. George's Bay. This I admit; but in doing so they would not be able to get to the Banks with the bait till a month later than usual, when they would find that, like the year I have mentioned, the fish would be left the Banks and their bait would be of no use to them. Supposing, however, for argument sake, that the fish had not left the Banks when they arrived there, the time they would get there would be just about the same period that most of them now leave with their first trip, so that they would be able to make but one trip for the season. Another disadvantage to them would be that at the time of their arrival on the Banks the herring would be out of season, it being then about the commencement of the caplin scull, and in all probability the fish would not take the bait at all; in which case their fishery would be a total failure. It has also been said that if we stop the bait they can get mackerel in England, herring in Scotland, sardines in France, or clams in America. Even so, that would only have the effect of stopping the fish on the Banks early in the spring, until the usual time of receiving our fresh herring; or, at furthest, it would only enable them to make one trip. Then, if we don't give them caplin, how are they to make the second trip? And to think

of catching fish in caplin scull on rusty mackerel and herring, would be madness. Thus the question is settled,—they cannot do without our herring early in the spring, nor can they continue the fishery without our caplin.

The principal object we ought to have in view, (or rather ought to have had in view some thirty or forty years ago) is to stop the supply of herring, if possible, very early in the spring; by doing so the fish would strike in, and the caplin, even if taken to the Banks, would be of no use, as in the year 1846, which I have referred to, when the French caught little more than enough fish to pay for the bait.

It is also essentially necessary that this bait-hauling practice should be put an end to, even if it was not the cause of the evil results I have spoken of, for another important consideration,—that by this means the baiting-places in many parts of the island have been, and are being, either totally drained of the bait or else are very sensibly decreasing. Every year, in addition to the complaints we hear of there being no fish to catch, we also hear of the scarcity of bait, and our fishermen are often obliged to stay on shore idle, knowing that there is fish outside to be caught, but unfortunately not having the means of catching it. About forty years ago, about the same time as that of the introduction of the bultow on the Banks, by the French, there was a baiting-place about St. Peter's and Miquelon equal to any in the island. This supplied the French with bait, but they required so much of it, and inconsequence of the immense quantities taken from this place, coupled with the taking of caplin so early in the spring, they had no time to spawn; the quantity began to fall off, and continued to do so every year till, at the end of about twenty years, there was not a caplin to be got there. Since that time the French have been supplied by our fishermen from our baiting-places. There were but few who engaged in carrying the bait to St. Peter's at first, but the success they met with induced others to follow

their example, and the number of bait carriers has been increasing ever since, till at last the number engaged in this traffic in Fortune and Placentia Bays is almost as great as that of the fishermen. The quantity of bait thus taken from our baiting-places is enormous. The number of bankers engaged in the Bank fishery is about 350, of about 250 to 350 tons each. These take with them, for the first trip, on an average of 100 barrels of herring each; and for the second trip 100 hhds. of caplin, equal to 200 barrels; so that the quantity of bait taken by these bankers is about 105,000, and the quantity required for the Shore fishery is about 5000 barrels. To these we may safely add 20,000 barrels, being the supposed quantity destroyed on their way to and at St. Peter's. (Such was the extent of the destruction of herring and caplin a few years ago at St. Peter's, that the Government would allow no more to be thrown overboard in the harbour, as the anchorage of shipping was affected thereby.) Thus the whole quantity required to supply the bankers, or lost in doing so, is equal to 130,000 barrels. The 20,000 barrels thrown overboard, to which I have alluded, can be accounted for in several ways. In the first place, it frequently happens that when a large haul is made there are only one or two boats to take them; and when these are loaded the remainder, often several hundred barrels, have to be thrown away. Another frequent occurrence is, that there are some 50 or 60 vessels loaded with herring either at St. Peter's or on their way there, after the last banker has been supplied; and there being no sale for them they are either thrown overboard or taken home for manure. The same observation may be applied to the caplin scull, when an equal quantity of caplin is destroyed in the same way. Besides this, it often happens, particularly during caplin scull, that numbers of vessels loaded with bait are on their way to St. Peter's, when they are met by adverse winds or delayed by calm weather, in which case they have to throw the caplin overboard, as the

French will take none but the freshest bait; and the vessels so engaged return to the baiting places to take in a fresh cargo.

Between Lamaline and Point aux Gauls, a distance of three miles, is a small bay or cove,—from thence to the entrance of Lamaline harbor is a continuation of rocks and shoals; inside of which is deep water,—to this place the caplin resort annually in greater abundance than at any other place on the Western shore, or perhaps in Newfoundland. This would appear to be destined by Providence as a breeding-place for caplin,—the rocks and shoals so protecting them that they lie in deep water in perfect security, while they have a fine strand, upwards of a mile in length, to spawn upon. During that season this strand formerly looked like a bed of spawn, while in the deep water might have been seen tens of thousands of barrels of caplin, which were only disturbed occasionally when our fishermen required a little for bait. From the commencement to the close of the caplin scull, (when the eyes of the caplin become red, denoting the time of their departure) there was no lack of either fish or bait,—it was load and go all the time. When the Cruiser was discontinued this little bay became the chief place of resort for the vessels engaged in supplying the French with bait. The caplin no sooner approached the shore than they were hauled, before they had time to spawn; and the result is, that the place I have described as being, when protected, a bed of spawn, has, since then, no more appearance of spawn than the Mall in St. John's. The immense quantity of caplin taken to St. Peter's, before allowing them to spawn, has already produced its natural and serious consequences—viz., the great scarcity of bait throughout the length and breadth of the Western shore, so much complained of the last few years.

The baiting-place about St. Peter's, which was as well stocked as any in the island, was, as I have said, completely ruined in about 20 years. Since then the

other baiting-places on our shores, from which the annual supply has been taken, have also been decreasing in the manner I have described; and I have no hesitation in saying that if this decrease continues in the same ratio, as it inevitably must if the immense quantities of bait be still taken, in ten years hence the fishermen of the Western shore will not have a caplin to bait their hooks. This evil, which is a serious one in itself, is also the cause of another. The scarcity of bait thus induced, and which is becoming more and more apparent and alarming every year, operates in another and more direct way to cause a scarcity of fish, at least on the grounds about the baiting-places from which the bait is taken. When fish approach the shore and find no caplin, they naturally move on to another place in order to find it. This was exemplified in a striking manner in the year 1847, when the French, having smarted severely by the means used by the British government the year previous, in keeping them without the bait, were out to St. Peter's much earlier than usual. The British made great efforts to supply them with bait before the arrival of the Cruiser, which they expected from St. John's, and which did not arrive till much later than the year before. By this means the French were enabled to get to the Banks as early as usual. The consequence was, the French fishery that year exceeded that of former years, and the fishery of Newfoundland was almost a total failure, with the exception, however, of Lamaline, where the Cruiser was stationed to protect the caplin, and where an unusually large catch was made; while off the adjoining harbours, from whence the caplin had been taken, hardly a fish was to be caught. But, here, it may naturally be asked,—If this be the case, and the people are thus seeing their means of subsistence taken from them, how is it that there is not more said?—and how is it that this monstrous evil is allowed to continue, and no representation made about it? This may be answered in this way:—The chief place of resort for the bait-carriers,

in getting their supply for the French, is about Lamaline. This being the best baiting place from that Westward, the fishermen from Fortune and Hermitage Bays, and other places Westward, resort here during the fishing season, and here they catch the largest portion of the voyage. This place being still pretty well stocked with caplin the fishermen generally get nearly enough for their own use, and when they are unable to procure it they generally get it from the bait-carriers, who give it to them as a sort of *quietus*, to prevent them making any disturbance or using any means to prevent them. Thus the fishermen go on from year to year, trusting to chance to get their supply of bait; and so long as they succeed in doing this, they will not think it worth while to make any stir in the matter. Another cause to which the silence of the fishermen on this matter may be attributed is, that the fishing about Lamaline, where this baiting-place is, has continued to thrive every year, while the other parts of the island have almost totally failed,—from the circumstance that the fish are generally stopped in their usual Westward course by the quantity of bait they find here, and also by the large number of fishermen always engaged here, and who are continually throwing bait overboard.

The number of large boats that come to Lamaline from the places I have mentioned is about 300. If this baiting place be destroyed (and it cannot hold out long, as the fish must, as a consequence, follow the bait) the serious question then presents itself,—Where are the large number of fishermen, who derive their subsistence from this place, to go to, to look for their support? The question is far more easily asked than answered, but it is one which, I apprehend, will be forced upon us if measures be not taken to prevent it.

Another circumstance that ought to receive our consideration is, that the other kinds of bait, of which we formerly had plenty, have also been declining. Some 30 or 40 years ago we had abundance of mack-

erel on our coast,—now there is none to be caught except on the Labrador. The bill-fish, too, of which there was plenty, are also gone. The squids, which come after the caplin, and with which the fishermen were in the habit of catching a large portion of their voyage, are in many districts extinct altogether; and in others, in which they are but seldom obtained, they are immediately taken, salted, and carried to St. Peter's,—and this trade is carried on as far distant as Conception Bay. The year I last mentioned, (1847) during the stay of the Revenue Cruiser at Lamaline, a vessel, loaded with squids bound for St. Peters, was seized. The squids were taken out of the vessel and distributed among the fishermen, and with this bait alone thousands of quintals of fish were caught. I mention this circumstance to show the value of this kind of bait, and also to shew another of the benefits derived from the Cruiser having been stationed on the coast. Thus, out of five different kinds of bait which we could formerly calculate upon getting at the different seasons of the year, we now have only two upon which we can at all rely —viz., herring and caplin.

Taking all these things into consideration, it will be obvious to every one how imperative it is upon us to use every means in our power to protect these indispensable articles, and to put a stop to those measures by which our chief support, the fisheries, are being so seriously affected.

I have, I am afraid, wearied you with this recapitulation of the causes which operate against our staple article. You will naturally be of opinion, however, that these are sufficient to effect the most disastrous results, without any help from other sources. It is a lamentable fact, moreover, and a subject of sad reflection to our fishermen, that our chief dependance is attacked on all sides by enemies as manifold and different in their nature as they are destructive in their effects. Indeed I think it would be hard to find any other creature whose very existence is threatened by

such a combination of unfriendly influences as our cod-fish, herring, and "poor little caplin."

In addition to the ravages which we see committed by the last-mentioned class of individuals, the bait-carriers, we find that there are others, calling themselves honest fishermen, who have not the least hesitation in using certain means for enriching themselves, totally regardless of the fact that by the same way they accomplish this, their sole object, they are depriving others of their only means of subsistence. There is not, I suppose, a fisherman of any experience in the island who does not know that the use of the bultow on the Banks is the very means by which he finds the credit-side of his account with his supplying merchant becoming less and less every year. This is a thing that is universally known, and yet we find some who are too idle to earn their bread in the same manner as their more honest and hard-working neighbours, or are not content with the rate at which they are filling their purses, or from some equally discreditable reason, scruple not to adopt this nefarious method of destroying our staple commodity, and thus rendering another powerful auxiliary in working out the unfortunate state of our country.

The French who are not allowed to use the bultow within three leagues of their own shore, as well as some of our own fishermen, of late years, have attempted to use the bultow at Lamaline and the adjoining harbors; but our fishermen have protested against it, knowing right well the ruinous and prejudicial effect the bultows would have, and that no fish can be caught with the hook and line on any ground where they are used. Our fishermen, therefore, do not hesitate, whenever they come across them, to help themselves to the fish, and cut them adrift and destroy them. Some of the fishermen have, however, succeeded in their object in Fortune Bay, by mustering a strong force and resisting the interference of the majority, contending that there was no law to prevent them. Several hundred quintals were taken in this

manner last winter; and I am credibly informed it is the determination of the same parties to engage in this system to a much greater extent this winter—and great efforts are about to be made to accomplish the same purpose at Lamaline next summer.

Now, Lamaline, as I have said, was the only part of the country where the fishery had not failed, to a certain extent, last season. This has, therefore, been the cause of serious apprehensions on the part, not only of the fishermen of Lamaline, but also of the large numbers who come here from other ports, and depend on this place for so large a portion of their voyage. These apprehensions are indeed well founded, and the inevitable consequence will be that Lamaline, and the other parts of the western coast, will by this means be reduced to the same level of poverty and distress as other districts of the Island. The people of these places have expressed a feeling of just pride, that while other districts have been receiving sums of poor-relief from the government, they have had no necessity. If, however, the bultow is used as it is intended, I think these people will not much longer be able to indulge in their wonted boast of independence, and that they also will have to be included in the list of recipients of Government assistance. I am reluctant to make this prediction, but a slight observation only of the results already accruing from this system will not admit of my coming to any other conclusion.

There is another source of annoyance and injury to our patient fishermen, and one which ought certainly to be removed;—I mean the encroachments of the French on our fishing grounds, whereby our fishermen are deprived of a large proportion of their voyage. Some years ago there was a fishing ground about St. Peter's as productive as any in the island. In consequence, however, of the bait having been taken away in the manner described, and from the circumstance of the French splitting their fish on the ground where it is caught, (which has a great tend-

ency to spoil a fishing ground), this one has at last been altogether destroyed, and the French have since been getting the largest portion of their voyage from our English grounds, so that of late years the Western portions of the coast have been completely overrun with these trespassers, getting bait as well as fish. The quantity which they catch is not less than 40,000 qtls. annually. They even go so far as to come and help themselves to our reserved bait, which we, in our Western phraseology, term "cocks and hens." While engaged in this business there often arises another evil, and a very crying one, especially among our young men, that they carry off numbers of our fair daughters, whom they meet with in their digging occupations.

It is true that for many years there has been a man-of-war, or at least a boat's crew, stationed on different parts of the coast to prevent these encroachments;—but this has been done, more for the name of the thing, I think, than from any good that has ever resulted from it. Besides, there are many causes to which this want of vigilance on the part of the British officer may be attributed,—some of which are best known to themselves in their private instructions. The officer who is commissioned to this duty is an individual more entitled to a share of our sympathy than many are aware of. The French are a very generous and hospitable people, especially to British officials of every description,—a fact which my own individual experience has decidedly convinced me of. The effect of this generosity and hospitality on the unfortunate, or rather fortunate, British officer may easily be imagined, and we ought therefore to make every allowance for the mistakes which he sometimes falls into, *accidentally of course*, in the discharge of his duty. Thus it often happens that when French craft are engaged in their illicit practice on our shores, the recollection of the sumptuous entertainment he has received has a most powerful influence in favour of the culprits who are allowed to pursue their occupa-

tion unmolested, because supposed to be unobserved by the official in question. Or if he be just returning from a champagne dinner, or *dejeuner a la fourchette*, the effect on his organs of discernment is peculiar,—probably such as that once produced upon either one or the other of the two statesmen who having returned to the House of Parliament from a similar entertainment, their peculiar and happy situation was illustrated by the following little conversation,—

"I can't see the Speaker, dear Harry, can you?
Not see the Speaker! why, I can see two."

It sometimes happens, however, that our friend, the official, does not indulge in the "creature-comforts" to the extent to which he has been so bountifully treated, so that his powers of perception are not at all times sufficiently acute to enable him to stumble against some unfortunate Frenchman, when a question often arises as to the legality of the act or otherwise, it being doubtful on which side of the boundary-line the culprit is caught. This boundary being halfway between St. Peter's and our shore, the officer generally gets the best of the argument, as he seldom fails to convince his opponent that he is *quite* if not *a little* more than "half seas over." To this I attribute the laxity of the British officer in the discharge of his duty; and hence it is that the French carry their practice of fishing on our grounds to such an extent.

The foregoing is the substance of what I stated in my former lecture. Several circumstances have come under my notice since then, and which, while they strengthen my adherence to the opinions I expressed, also disclose to us the alarming position in which we are now placed.

There is another branch of our fishery that I omitted to notice in my former lecture, and which I now beg to bring under your observation, and that is, our fall and winter cod-fishery to the Westward, in the district of Burgeo and LaPoile. Formerly numbers of large four-handed boats, belonging to Fortune and Placentia Bays, were in the habit of going to the said

fishery, leaving in October and returning in February, each with a cargo of fish, and averaging 50 qtls. per man. This once most profitable fishery is almost ruined, and is given up entirely by the said parties. This is attributable to the supply of bait to the French. In the first place it enables them to come on our shores, between St. Peter's and Lamaline, thereby intercepting the fish on their Westward course, with bultows by night and hook and line by day, till nearly all is caught;—and, in the second place, the French bankers of late years have been in the habit of remaining on the Banks (when the weather will permit of their doing so) till Xmas—and stopping the fish there that otherwise would come in to the shore.

Having mentioned the ruinous effect on our cod fishery, caused by supplying the French with herring so very early in the spring before they had time to spawn, I shall now bring under your notice the effect produced on our herring fishery by the destruction of such an immense quantity of herring. Formerly, and previous to the use of herring seines, (which have only been since the French and Americans required the herring for bait) in Fortune and Placentia Bays, in the months of November and December, a sufficient quantity of herring could have been taken to supply all British North America, (or all that was required at that time); also, to supply Newfoundland for every purpose, and thousands of barrels more might have been taken in almost every harbour on the North side of said Bays, if a market could have been found for them. Now, during the periods aforesaid, there is not a herring to be got for exportation, or for the use of the fishermen's families, and hardly enough bait for the fishermen, so that our once most valuable fall-herring fishery is ruined in toto—and all in consequence of the use of seines in supplying the French with bait. To remedy this monstrous evil, and that our winter and spring herring [illegible] not share the same fate, I think the only way would be to pro-

hibit the use of herring seines from the last of October to the last of May, (about which time the herring have generally spawned.) *To prevent the use of seines to any time short of the said period, would, I consider, be the most effectual means possible of serving the very parties that have been instrumental in reducing our cod and herring fisheries to what they now are.* Much more might be said of the evil consequences resulting to our cod and herring fisheries, by supplying the French with bait; but time will not admit of my doing so this evening. Now, there are other causes tending to produce the results we are now lamenting,—one of them is the use of cod-seines on the same grounds where the hook and line are used. The effects produced by this practice, I can myself testify to. I have often observed upwards of three hundred punts together on the same ground, early in the morning, the fishermen catching fish as fast as they could haul them in; when presently a cod-seine skiff makes its appearance. I will not attempt to describe the vexation of those hundreds of fishermen at this most unwelcome sight;—they at once commence to talk to each other in not very mild terms of the cause of their annoyance, and finish by saying, "We may as well give up our spert for to-day," or something of the sort. A very short time shows that they are right The skiff comes alongside, the men shoot the seine, and at the same time begin to throw the dowser, stones. &c., into the water, to frighten the fish into the seine. Whether they do so or not, they invariably frighten the fish off of the ground, and hundreds of poor fishermen, who began the day in the full expectation of loading their punts, have the mortification of seeing the fish darting away before their eyes;—their expectations are thereby frustrated, and they are obliged to haul up and leave the ground; and thus one of the few days good fishing which they were likely to be favoured with for the season is unceremoniously taken from them; while it often happens that in the very seine which has caused all this

mischief, not a quintal of fish is taken. Another objection to the use of the cod-seines is, that the fish taken in them are generally small, so that large quantities are continually being thrown away, whilst the quality of those that are saved is generally inferior to that caught with the hook and line. It is certainly desirable that this method of catching fish should be discontinued, as no serious inconvenience would result to those who use it,—at least as compared with the general benefit thus derived. As those who use the cod-seine are generally independent, and could very well afford to do without them,—and from the fact that of late years there has been, on the whole, but little profit derived from this method of fishing, apart from these latter considerations, we have the broad principle that the interests of the few should yield to that of the many.

At Lawn this principle is practically carried into effect by the fishermen, who, knowing the evil results produced by the use of cod-seines on the same grounds where the hook and line are used, do not use the seines on their own grounds themselves, and will permit no one else to use them, although they do not object to others fishing on their grounds, provided they use the same method as themselves.

There are, I believe, some who are inclined to deny that the fish ever have or ever will strike in from the Banks. In support of the assertion which I have already made, that the fish *do* strike in, I wish to make a few observations, although perhaps at the risk of tiring some of you who are already convinced of the fact. In the year which I have before mentioned, 1846, the unusually large quantity of fish caught all along our shores did not furnish the only proof that those fish came from the Banks. The French fishery on the Banks, as before stated, was a total failure; but in addition to this, the fish caught this year were unusually large, and of a different sort from the common shore fish. What was still more remarkable,—the fish, after having followed the caplin close

to the shore, in some places got into shoal water among rocks, and after remaining a short time were thrown dead upon the shore in immense quantities, or remained near the shore, apparently perfectly helpless; which led the fishermen to the immediate conclusion that they were Bank fish, and unaccustomed to the shore.

The year 1848, that of the French revolution, was somewhat similar to '46, when, from some cause, the French were prevented from getting to the Banks till late, when the same results followed, the French fishery was a failure, and ours an unusually productive one. The fish also being the large Bank fish.

Another circumstance is, that some few of this description, which are known to all our fishermen as Bank fish, are now and then caught on our grounds with the French hook and part of the sod-line in their mouths; both of which, being different from ours, are at once recognized as being those of the French bankers. A good proof, however, may be brought forward in connection with the offing fishery about St. John's, already referred to. Last spring, in consequence of the ice, the French bankers were prevented from anchoring on the Eastern part of the Banks as early as usual,—the fish immediately struck in and remained in the offing on the whole of the ground between Cape St. Francis and Cape Race, where they were occasionally caught by the fishermen of different harbours. The scarcity of bait, and not having the large jacks in which the fishery was formerly prosecuted, being the only causes that prevented the fishermen from following up this fishery with success.

Another and most convincing proof is, that in the year before mentioned (1846) some of the French themselves, having arrived at St. Peter's so late, observed that the fish had left the Banks, and at once predicted, what afterwards turned out, that their voyage would be ruined and the fish come in to our shores. This circumstance, while it serves as a proof of the correctness of what I have stated, also shows

how thoroughly the French are acquainted with the fish and their habits, and to what an extent their opinions in these matters may be relied on.

Several circumstances have occurred during the past 12 months which have justly been the cause of a great deal of alarm among the fishermen of the Western coast. The first is, the enormous extent to which the bait-carriers carried their ruinous traffic; —this was not only in the quantity supplied to the French, but also in the quantity destroyed in so doing, which was so immense that the French government were obliged again to issue an order to stop the throwing of the bait overboard in the harbour, as the anchorage of shipping was affected. The quantity thrown overboard in St. Peter's harbour, the roadstead, and Fortune Bay last spring was at the lowest estimation 40,000 barrels.

Taking into consideration the extra quantity which the French would naturally take when (as was the case last Spring) they could get it for nothing, it would be hard to estimate the actual quantity of herring *wasted* by this ruinous traffic. I cannot find words to express my indignation that a traffic involving such a wanton waste of one of our chief sources of support, should be continued, while hundreds of our population are starving from this very cause.

Another alarming circumstance, that occurred last winter, was the presence of an American Schooner at Burgeo, fitted out with bultows, which were effectually used, in spite of the efforts of the people to prevent it. The following is an extract from a letter on this subject, dated at Burgeo, and published in the *Daily News* of the 17th April last:—

"There is another matter to which I wish to call your attention, having been urged to do so by the parties Agents here: not that I needed their spur, as I think myself it is quite a sufficient cause for alarm. I allude to the fact of an American Schooner, which has been on the shore all the winter, fishing on the ground with 'Bultow,' a practice not resorted to by our fishermen,

and one to which they are bitterly opposed. They have expostulated with the owners, who, in return, challenged them to 'fight it out.' The Schooner is furnished with three boats, each having three miles of bultow, so that they fish up almost every fish that crosses the ground. They have caught a great quantity, while our folks have done next to nothing. They say if they do well, there will be 50 Schooners down next year from their harbour. Independent of the destructive nature of the bultow to the fishery, it is quite evident our fishermen could not resort to such a method, as the ground is not large enough to contain so many as would be required. Are we, therefore, to stand by and see the little bread we have taken out of our mouths, by a method we disapprove of, and one which we cannot follow?"

This letter shows that the opinions of the fishermen, with regard to the effects of the use of the bultow, are the same as those which I have expressed. The winter fishery at Burgeo and LaPoile, and Fortune Bay, and the summer fishery at Lamaline, may be said to be the sole support of the large number of fishermen to the West of Cape Chapeau Rouge. The fishing ground at Lamaline offers peculiar advantages to the bultow fishermen;—a large extent of bank on which to lay the bultow, but two miles from a safe and comfortable roadstead, and close to the only good baiting-place along the coast. Should the Americans carry out the threat of bringing a large number of bankers to fish on our grounds in the winter, there is no doubt that, if they are allowed to do so, the winter fishery will soon be ruined: and that once having found out the advantages offered by the Lamaline fishing-ground in the summer, this, the only remaining fishing-ground along the whole Western coast, on which thousands of fishermen are entirely dependent, must inevitably share the same fate, not alone by the destruction of the cod-fish, but also by opening up another enormous drain on our already nearly exhausted baiting-places. If the intention of the Americans be carried out, as in all probability it will be, and that this very winter and next summer,

I again repeat the question,—"What is to become of the number of fishermen who will thus be inevitably deprived of their only means of support?"

Another circumstance, and a serious one to many of our Western fishermen, is, that within the past twelve months three out of the only six supplying establishments between St. John's and Cape Ray have been nearly closed up, and the business of the remaining three greatly curtailed. NEWMAN & Co. have given up their business at Burgeo, and NICOLLE & Co. are winding up theirs at La Poile and Jersey Harbor. I mention this circumstance to shew that from the present aspect of our fisheries these merchants must have given up all hope of ever coming to any thing but ruin, if those fisheries were left as they now are. With such prospects continually before them, the wonder is that they did not give up before. Those merchants, who have spent so much of their time and money in those places, have had the best opportunities of looking into the prospects before them; and the contemplation of those prospects has induced them at last to do what they have been so long vainly endeavouring to avoid, viz., the abandonment of their business altogether. It would indeed be madness for any merchant to think of carrying on business with dealers whose prospects were similar to those of our once-prosperous fishermen. What prospects can be more gloomy than those *now* before our fishermen? Their almost sole support, the cod-fishery, rapidly dwindling down to nothing,—the wholesale destruction of herring and caplin, which every year results from the supply of bait to the French,—the alarming scarcity of bait in the baiting-places,—the number of French fishermen prosecuting the fishery on our very shores, taking, as it were, the bread from our own fishermen's mouths,—and the only fishing grounds of any consequence along the Western shore threatened with the appearance of a fleet of American bultow bankers to hasten the ruin of those grounds;—all these circumstances combine to form

no other prospect before our fishermen than the speedy and utter ruin of their once valuable fishing grounds. The rate of decrease in this our chief produce will be as great, if not greater than it has been for the past few years; and if nothing be done to check it, in a very few years our fisheries will not suffice to keep our people from starving.

I shall conclude this subject by merely noticing another powerful auxiliary in the general work of destruction;—I allude to the hauling of caplin for manure. You are all more familiar with this practice than I am, and therefore I need not dwell on it. In almost every direction this practice has been continued, and I need not tell you of the result. Every one acquainted with the subject knows that every baiting-place that is resorted to by those who haul caplin for manure is being rapidly drained of its produce. No other result could possibly flow from such a regular and extensive system of hauling, and that always in the spawning season, -a system which, under any circumstances, ought not to be encouraged,—nay, in the present exhausted state of our baiting-places, is *unpardonable*. I shall say no more on this subject. The disastrous results which flow from this system, and the consequent necessity for putting a total stop to it, are matters as well known to you as myself.

I am afraid that I have jumbled my matter together in a rather unsystematic manner; but I hope, at the same time, that what I have endeavoured, however imperfectly, to lay before you, will be sufficient to convince you that there is no use in expecting that "Providence will again smile upon us" unless we do something to help ourselves. If we desire to see the time when our fisheries will afford compensation for the labour of our fishermen, and our country return to its former state of prosperity, we must make a united and determined effort, and avail of every means calculated to bring about the result. If not, how can we expect ever to see any the slightest improvement in our fisheries, or even to check their rapid decline?

Let us, if possible, prevent the French from getting the bait in the Spring, or even detain them for a few weeks,—let us protect our invaluable baiting-places from the encroachments of the bait-carriers,—let us put a stop to the use of bultows and cod-seines by our own fishermen, and prevent others from using any other method than that used by ourselves,—the hook and line,—let us keep the French, with their bultows, from our fishing grounds,—and let us put a stop to the disgraceful practice of using our invaluable caplin for manure,—and, above all things, let us prohibit the use of herring-seines until after the herring shall have spawned. When we have done all this, then, and, I say most emphatically, *not till then*, may we reasonably expect that "Providence will smile upon us," and that, in spite of what those interested may now say to the contrary, our fisheries will again thrive, and our country be saved.

"SUCCESS TO THE FISHERIES!"

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